

MIKE SCHLEIER

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

NO DAY FOR MURDER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The Miami Redhead had two assignments he could have done without: nailing a gunrunning gang and finding a long-vanished woman. They turned out to be equally dangerous 5 to 45

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Friend Of The Family

by JACK RITCHIE

The Kid Had Possibilities — but His Mother Knew Best . . .

MABLE ASKED ME OVER because she wanted me to talk her boy Dave out of trying to play professional football.

"When do you graduate?" I asked.

"Next June," Dave said. "My degree is in physical education."

Dave was five foot ten and weighed around 170. He lived football, ate football, and dreamed football.

I turned a page of the scrapbook he'd brought out for my inspection. "In high school you made the state all-star team?"

He tried to be modest about it. "There were a lot of good backs around at the time. I was lucky to get picked."

"If he's got to go into sports," Mable said, "why couldn't it be baseball? It's a lot safer, and he got on the state all-star team for that too."

My eyes went to the framed photo portrait of Dave's father on the fireplace mantel. How long had Joe been dead? About ten

years? Joe had been one of the best hit men the Syndicate had ever had. Twenty-two contracts and not even so much as a traffic ticket.

"Yesterday Mr. Wannecker was here," Dave said. "He's with the Pittsburgh Steelers' front office. And I also got a letter from New Orleans Saints last week."

"Anything besides that?"

"Not yet."

I turned another page of the scrapbook. Dave as a college freshman. No newspaper photographs. Freshman games aren't that important. Just a few small clippings, and half of them from the school paper. "Who made the top offer?" I asked.

"The Steelers."

"How much?"

"The first money isn't so important. There's always a chance for more when you're playing with a contender. Just being on a Super Bowl team could nearly double my salary."

I glanced up at Joe's photo-

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graph again. Joe had been a drinker. And one night he took one too many and his car didn't make a curve.

I turned my attention back to the scrapbook. Dave as a sophomore. Not too much print there, either. His big years were his junior and senior.

I pointed to one of the clippings. "You didn't do too bad in baseball, either. You got the conference batting crown."

He brushed that off. "Football's really my game."

Mable brought Coke and ice. Just that. Coke and ice. Ever since Joe's accident, Mable wouldn't allow any liquor in her house. Not even beer.

"I don't like the idea of Dave playing football for a living," she said. "Once he broke his ankle. Another time it was his collarbone. And then there's his knee always kicking out. He should consider something safe and steady. Something you can depend on year after year."

I agreed and was tempted to make him an offer then and there.

I closed the scrapbook. "Do the Steelers know about the trick knee?"

Unconsciously Dave massaged his right knee. "There's nothing to know."

I sighed. "I got to level with you, Dave. I'm a friend of the family and I'm thinking of your own good. You were a big frog in a little pond. The next pond is too

big for you. You'll get lost."

He flushed. "The Steelers don't think so."

I shrugged. "What did they really offer you? The league minimum? If you don't get cut out in training camp? And what about the New Orleans Saints? All they sent you was a form letter, right? Just fill this out and send it right back. Don't call us, we'll call you? Dave, they mail those out by the hundreds just to cover the field. But they never yet picked up a hot prospect that way. And look at your size. You played fullback at your little league college, but in the pros you'd be light even for a quarterback."

His flush deepened. "I'm a hard-nosed player. That makes up for size."

"Sure, sure," I said. "You're a hard-nosed player. But so is everybody up there in the professional leagues. All hard-nosed and all bigger and all faster than you. You got to face the facts, Dave. We can't always do what we like to do or be where we want to be."

Mable nodded quickly. "But you've still got that baseball offer from the Milwaukee Brewers. You wouldn't get hurt like you would in football."

Dave sighed and then smiled faintly. "All right, Mom. I'll sleep on it a few nights and we'll see. But I'm not promising anything."

I WAITED until he left the room with the scrapbook. "To tell you the truth, Mable, I don't think he'll make it in baseball either. At least not in the major leagues."

She seemed to agree. "Probably you're right. But I'll let him have this sports kick and then maybe he'll take up something serious later. Like law school."

"I could offer him a spot in the organization right now," I said. "You can't beat the pay and you only got to work two or three days a year."

"That's the whole trouble," Mable said. "Dave would have all that free time. He'd hit the bottle just like Joe did. I know he would. No, Dave has got to have something that keeps him busy

fifty-two weeks a year."

She saw me to the door.

"By the way, Mable," I said. "I may have something for you in a couple of weeks. Hennesy in St. Louis has been giving the organization some trouble."

She nodded. "Give me a couple of days' notice so I can get a permanent."

When Joe died, Mable stepped into his shoes. We like to keep the business in the family, and besides she had the kid to bring up and send to school. She's handled nineteen contracts so far and we can depend on her.

I turned up my collar as I left. The air was a little nippy, but perfect for football.

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